

Nov 10th, 2:15 PM

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Lee, Sae-eun; Son, Hyungjin; Lee, Yuri; and Ha, Jisoo, "The Meaning of Fashion: Implicit and Explicit Self-esteem and Depression" (2016). *International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference Proceedings*. 23.

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## The meaning of fashion: Implicit and explicit self-esteem and depression

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**Keywords:** Fashion therapy, implicit associated self-esteem, implicit associated depression

Despite the existence of positive power in fashion, the society today tends to focus on the negative aspects of the fashion such as accelerating and ostentatious consumptions. Previous researches, however, argued that fashion can be a tool to improve self-esteem and to reduce depression regarding its therapeutic role for consumers (Horn & Gurel, 1981; Masuch & Hefferon, 2014). Moreover, researchers only have investigated of the effect of fashion on the explicit self-regard and the depression in which the research about the implicit self-regard and the depression has not done yet. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between the implicit self-esteem and the depression to fill the gap. In psychological field, the therapy is considered to be effective as both external and internal selves are healed. Hence, this study employed implicit self-reported method to examine the genuine therapeutic effect of fashion. This study is significant as it facilitated the implicit association test (IAT) in first place in fashion field. The purpose of the study is to develop the foundation of positive effect of fashion by revealing the relationship between the fashion and the substantial self.

### Theoretical background

#### *Fashion competency*

Fashion competency is defined as an individual's attitude toward fashion including the acquisition of regarding fashion knowledge which would increase subjective assurance and confidence on making decisions such as purchasing products and styling oneself (Choi, 2006). The concept of it includes the idea of self-confidence in fashion coordination, fashion involvement and fashion trend. Researches implied that when the level of interest and confidence on fashion is higher, the self-esteem is improved (Joung & Miller, 2006), and the depression is reduced (Dubler & Gurel, 1984) but most of researches disregarded the implicit aspect of the fashion competency.

#### *Implicit association test: IAT*

Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998) originally invented the implicit association test (IAT) to measure an individual's implicit attitudes toward the race and gender. By taking IAT, the implicit attitudes of individuals toward the race and gender would be measured if they have racial and sexual discriminations or not. de Jong (2002) transformed the IAT into the measurement of the implicit associated self-esteem. For instance, the process of the implicit associated self-esteem would follow each steps: 1) set up the target category to 'self/other,' 2) arrange the particular category with adjectives such as 'positive/negative,' 3) combine terms 'about self/about others' and 'positive word/negative word' together differently and associate them with the reaction key, and 4) measure the strength of each of the combinations through the reaction time to prove its usefulness. In other words, a group with higher implicit associated self-esteem/lower implicit associated depression shows faster

reaction time when the block with positive word consisted to the self is showed on the screen.

### *Method*

Samples of young consumers, who are in their 20s, were collected from a metropolitan area in South Korea. Self-reported survey, which includes fashion competency, self-esteem, and depression, was conducted prior to the IAT. The IAT was conducted afterward to measure the implicit associated self-esteem and depression.

### *Results*

This study investigated the relationship between the fundamental self and fashion competency through the IAT. In order to do so, authors divided the sample into two groups, self-esteem (high/low) and depression (happy/depressed), for further analysis based on the data results. Three dependent variables were extracted from the factor analysis regarding the fashion competency which are involvement (IN), innovativeness (IV), self-confidence in fashion coordination (FC). Based on the IAT results, the mean value of each factor of the fashion competency was compared, and factor IN and FC showed a significant difference. Both groups, a group with higher self-esteem ( $M_{IN}=3.91>3.6$ ,  $M_{FC}=3.79<3.49$ ) and with higher happiness ( $M_{IN}=3.92>3.52$ ,  $M_{FC}=3.72>3.51$ ), showed higher level of involvement and the fashion competency than the group with neither of high self-esteem and happiness. 2 (IAT Self-esteem: high<sub>1</sub>, low<sub>1</sub>) X 2 (Survey Self-esteem: high, low) mean comparison was conducted to confirm the differences of results from different research methods. Results showed that the group, which categorized them to the lower self-esteem through explicit method, showed a significant difference of IN ( $M_{low1/low2}3.18 \rightarrow M_{high1/low2}3.83$ ) and FC ( $M_{low1/low2}3.2 \rightarrow M_{high1/low2}3.8$ ). Such significant differences are congruent with analysis result from the depression data.

### *Discussion*

Results from the IAT revealed that individuals with positive implicit self has higher level of involvement and fashion consistency than the individuals with negative implicit self. Moreover, this study implies that the differences of the implicit self are partially congruent with the fashion competency. As the results from the explicit and implicit tests showed different level of fashion competency, future research could consider the IAT as research methods in addition to the explicit tests.

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This research was supported by Basic Science Research Program through the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF) funded by the Ministry of Education (NRF-2014S1A5A2A03065756)